

Scrutiny Commission Statement to Annual Council – 23 May 2023

Good scrutiny is an essential part of the Council's governance framework and is integral to decision making. Scrutiny Commission fulfils the statutory responsibility placed on local authorities to review and scrutinise decisions and actions taken, and they play a vital role in influencing services and shaping policies and plans which affect our residents and businesses.

New Ways of Working

Scrutiny returned to face-to-face meetings this year as the UK began to adapting to new ways of working. The Commissioners, Members and Officers embraced learning from the pandemic and used technology and virtual meetings to undertake some task and finish group work. This provided flexibility to our partners, experts and officers to increase participation in meetings.

We would like to thank all colleagues for their contribution to the work of Scrutiny Commission and its Work Groups this year, allowing meetings to run smoothly and as normal as possible as we find new ways to work together. This will see us working in different ways and engaging the public and partners with more technology-based solutions in the future.

Scrutiny 2022/23

Scrutiny Commission

Over the year Scrutiny Members' have contributed to policy development, reviewed, and scrutinised Cabinet Executive decisions and made recommendations to Cabinet on Affordable Housing and the Arriva Click Bus Service. Scrutiny Commission has also considered the following work topics:

Car Parking Consultation - Scrutiny was consulted on the Car Park Strategy 2022-2027 Consultation Feedback ahead of its formal adoption of the Strategy by full Council.

The consultation ran for 3 weeks and a total of 438 responses were received with 1466 comments. In consideration of the proposed budget proposals earlier in the year, Scrutiny had recommended that the work to make car parks cost neutral be explored. Key proposals had been forwarded for Members to consider.

Members provided comment on and questioned the eleven recommendations that had been proposed. They were broadly supportive of the proposed Car Park Strategy; suggesting that communication with residents was key in ensuring its success. Scrutiny also heard evidence from Friends of Narborough Station (FONS) about the proposals presented.

Staffing Update – Scrutiny had requested an update as a result of the LGA's Peer Review which had recommended a review of staff development. Members also wanted to consider the impact and reasons of high staff turnover. Members noted the following:

- a) Overall increase in sickness absence and mental health sickness absence figures.
- b) Workplace Health Needs Assessment - (a survey undertaken in March/April 2022) Staff had reported increased levels of stress and decreased wellbeing overall since the last survey. An action plan was being developed to understand this feedback in more detail particularly around: symptoms and or diagnosis, causes/factors, and support staff feel they would benefit from. Members requested to view the action plan being developed.
- c) Increased contact with Care First (Employee Assistance Programme). Members requested further information on current mental health support plans in place and planned future initiatives.
- d) Staff are now agile working – this led to a desire to understand how the impact on staff is being measured.
- e) Recruitment and retention of staff - Members considered staff turnover and exit surveys. Members questioned the Officer on Mental Health First Aiders, models of supervision, staff benefits, team building, social functions and training existing staff.

To enable this work to be examined further Scrutiny referred it to a Task and Finish Group. To date, the Group has met twice to consider evidence from HR Officers and Service Managers. Work will continue on this post-election with the new administration.

Youth Engagement Work in Community Services – Scrutiny Commission considered an update on recent work to tackle youth antisocial behaviour and crime following the move to a commissioning-based approach.

Blaby District Council moved to a commissioning-based service in January 2022 following a review of the in-house youth provision, BB19, which found that the service design was no longer flexible enough to meet the varied needs of young people in the district. Research nationally and locally by Leicestershire County Council, identified that service delivery should

include regularly trained and specialist services to focus on issues such as mental well-being, up to date drug issues and diversion from violent crime as well as ASB. There was also a recognised shift to on-line and schools-based programmes which BB19 could not offer. Duplication of services was identified and considered during the decision to cease the BB19 youth provision.

Members heard how street-based sessions are commissioned in response to ASB and crime from IMPACT, Streetvibe outreach sessions, specialist mentoring, partnership work as well as future plans for the service.

Members were pleased to learn that both Streetvibe and Impact have both been extremely responsive, and considered some case studies and examples of how the services had been used.

Budget 2023/24 - In January a comprehensive overview session provided background and context to the Council's draft Budget proposals setting the scene for robust questioning of Cabinet Executive Members.

- Council Tax - Members fully considered the options provided to increase Council Tax and were supportive of a 2.99% increase given the current financial uncertainty that local authorities face. Scrutiny considered the Settlement provided this year was favourable compared to previous years due to a 3% increase in Core Spending Power and noted that threshold limits were increased.
- Fair Funding Review - Members noted that the continued delay of the Fair Funding Review had prevented Council receiving a multi-year funding settlement and as a result, could not assess the impact it may have on our future financial position.
- Commercial Opportunities - Members recognised that a cultural change is required to successfully embed a commercially based approach across the Council. Scrutiny is pleased to note that Officers continue to look for opportunities to generate income to strengthen the Council's future financial position. This includes the Council benefitting from an agreement with Charnwood Borough Council for the provision of commercial support from their Director of Commercial & Economic Development. Members are keen to learn more about the future direction of commercialisation and the material level of income that can be expected. Members considered that a six-monthly update to Scrutiny Commission on the Commercial Strategy and Action Plan would be beneficial. Members were also pleased to note that investments should also directly benefit the District.

During the year Scrutiny Commission has also examined and commented on the Performance Report, Annual Complaints Report and the Corporate Action Plan.

Scrutiny will continue to be rigorous in providing constructive and supportive challenge to ensure that the Council is sustainable, drives improvement and the vulnerable are protected.

Task and Finish Groups

The Task and Finish Groups led by a Scrutiny Commissioner considered the following:

- Accommodation Study - External consultants had been engaged to look at local accommodation supply and demand, potential barriers and opportunities, and ongoing, to provide an action plan to implement the findings. They had previously done a presentation to the Tourism Partnership and were invited to update Scrutiny on this project. A lively and productive exchange of views helped both the consultants and Scrutiny understand where the gaps were.
- Review of parks and open spaces and promoting them on the Councils' main website, Visit Blaby website and Active Blaby website.
- Lightbulb – Members considered a home gadgets pilot with assisted technology to assist people to live more comfortable in their homes with less reliance on care workers. The pilot aimed at individuals with early signs of dementia. At that time, during the pilot, 300 referrals had been received. Members recommended that additional funding would be beneficial to maintain the Lightbulb Service.
- Procurement – Members considered the Procurement Strategy to find out how the Council could support more local businesses. The Task and Finish Group were pleased with the current approach and thanked the Finance Group Manager for a comprehensive update. No further recommendations were required.
- Performance Monitoring – Members received a virtual demonstration of the performance monitoring framework Pentana and considered key performance indicators. Scrutiny look forward to receiving quarterly reports on performance monitoring as the system is rolled out to staff.

Number of Meetings held

Over the course of the year Members took part in **23** Scrutiny meetings.

LGA Peer Review Recommendations and Learning

Members started the year's work programme continuing the alignment of working groups with the Blaby District Plan Priorities: Live, Work and Visit.

The Council undertook the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review with one of the key recommendations being that Scrutiny be

reviewed and refreshed. As a result, Members reviewed each working group and set each work item to be carried out as a Task and Finish Group, whilst considering how Scrutiny could be developed.

As a result of the LGA Peer Review recommendations, Scrutiny Commissioners sought feedback from Scrutiny Commission Members and consulted with training providers to enable a learning and development training programme to be put together for Members and Officers following the District Council election.

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) has put together a comprehensive training programme to be delivered on the following dates:

<p>Wednesday 14 June</p> <p>5:30pm</p> <p>Council Chamber, Council Offices</p>	<p><u>The Essentials of Effective Strategic Scrutiny.</u></p> <p>What the training will cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny influences and how to use them. • The foundations of effective scrutiny – collaboration, trust, and transparency. • Supporting performance • Adding value to policy and practice <p>Learning Outcome: At the end of this session Members should have a clear overview and understanding of scrutiny’s strategic role in helping to improve and shape council policy and plans through constructive scrutiny and enquiry.</p>
<p>Thursday 20 July</p> <p>5:30pm</p> <p>Council Chamber, Council Offices</p>	<p><u>Questioning Skills.</u></p> <p>What the training will cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core questioning and listening skills. • Developing a questioning strategy. <p>Learning Outcome: This session will help Members to develop questioning strategies and hold to account political decision makers.</p>
<p>Tuesday 5 September</p> <p>5:30pm</p> <p>Council Chamber, Council Offices</p>	<p><u>Work Programmes, setting priorities and focus.</u></p> <p>What the training will cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose of work programmes. • Importance of openness and collaboration. • Different scrutiny techniques to build agility and capacity. • To create a work programme that is strategically aligned and focused on improvement and community priorities.

	<p>Learning Outcome: Member and Officers will be able to understand the vital role that work programming has in effective scrutiny and how careful selection based on a rational process will help to prioritise and focus scrutiny on key priorities.</p>
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The training is mandatory for all Scrutiny Commission Members, however all Members are invited to attend.

Finally, the Scrutiny Commissioners would like to thank Cllr. Sam Maxwell – Scrutiny Commissioner and Vice-Chairman for her contribution to Scrutiny, having retired from her role as District Councillor at the recent District Council election.

Cllr. Sam Maxwell had been a member of Scrutiny Commission since 2012 and became Vice-Chairman and Scrutiny Commissioner in 2020.

Cllr. Geoff Welsh - Scrutiny Commission Chairman
Cllr. Sam Maxwell - Scrutiny Commissioner and Vice-Chairman
Cllr. Roy Denney - Scrutiny Commissioner and Vice-Chairman